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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SU](#) [LY](#) [CD](#)
SUBJECT: HISTORIC LEADER GOUKOUNI OUEDDEI RETURNS TO CHAD,
STRENGTHENING DEBY INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

REF: (A) NDJAMENA 343, (B) NDJAMENA 306,
(C) NDJAMENA 249

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Ex-President and long-time opposition figure Goukouni Oueddei returned to Chad August 18, met with President Deby and PM Abbas, and announced that he would return to Chad "permanently" to continue his efforts towards "national reconciliation" both with internal opposition political parties and external armed rebel groups. Goukouni urged all Chadians to join in the national-reconciliation effort, while specifying that he himself did not plan to enter Chadian politics on an electoral basis. Goukouni's return complements his 2007 meetings with Deby in Libreville and Ndjamena; his formation of a negotiating team; and his failed efforts to conciliate rebel chieftains Mahamat Nouri and Timan Erdimi then. It is too early to assess the full impact of Goukouni's "permanent" return, including what official position if any he will receive from the GOC and how successful he will be in wooing Chad armed rebels, but the ex-President's decision to throw in with Deby (like that of ex-rebel Ahmat Soubiane's similar recent decision - REF B) contributes to the Deby government's legitimacy and burnishes its commitment to national reconciliation writ large.

¶2. (SBU) Goukouni's reconciliation and return strengthen Deby's hand in several ways. It conciliates the frequently "discontented" Teda/Toubou people, for whom Goukouni is a prestigious figure, and by extension, the entire Gorane ethnic group, of which the Teda/Toubou are a part. It brings to the country another "historic figure" whose presence in Chad permits Deby to demonstrate his regime's inclusiveness, including to former foes; in this sense Goukouni replaces the recently deceased ex-President Malloum (REF C) in the "petit pantheon" of ex-rulers now reconciled with "the power in place." Finally, Goukouni's return adds credibility to Deby's commitment to "national reconciliation" including with Chad rebels in Sudan. It probably also earns Deby points with the Libyans as well.

¶3. (SBU) Goukouni's orientation has generally been pro-Libyan (and skeptical of French intentions in Chad), while Habre and Deby have generally been considered pro-Western (and skeptical of Libyan intentions in Chad. This latest visit may be part of the intensified Libyan effort to end the Chad-Sudan proxy war and enhance stability along its southern and southeastern border (REF A). END SUMMARY.

14. (U) Ex-President and long-time opposition figure Goukouni Oueddei returned to Chad August 18, met with President Deby and PM Abbas, and announced that he would return to Chad "permanently" to continue his efforts towards "national reconciliation" both with internal opposition political parties and external armed rebel groups. Goukouni urged all Chadians to join in the national-reconciliation effort, while specifying that he himself did not plan to enter Chadian politics on an electoral basis. Goukouni's return complements his 2007 meetings with Deby in Libreville and Ndjamena; his formation of a negotiating team; and his failed efforts to conciliate rebel chieftains Mahamat Nouri and Timan Erdimi then.

15. (U) The 65-year old Goukouni was accompanied by a members of a "technical committee" dedicated to peacemaking among Chadians and members of his own political movement, the National liberation Front of Chad (FNLT). He was greeted at the airport by the National Mediator, Abderaman Moussa, and other officials. After his meetings with the President and PM, Goukouni traveled to his ancestral homeland in northwestern Chad to preach national reconciliation to his Teda/Toubou ethnic brethren and to exhort them to support the Deby regime.

PUBLIC REMARKS

16. (U) Goukouni described to the press his intentions: "We are here not as mediators but as facilitators. We are trying to get in touch with all parties, the authorities as well as the discontented,

inside and outside the country. It is this exact framework, the search for peace, that we are here, to consult President Deby. With his agreement, if that is possible, we will continue our mission. If not, we will draw our own conclusions. We want to demonstrate our good faith and determination in the search for peace in Chad."

17. (U) When asked if he were returning definitively to the country, he replied that that depended on the government: "I do not think that this visit will keep me here long. I do not consider myself as in the opposition. I consider myself as always a part of this country. If temporarily I reside in Algeria, that does not mean that I am in the opposition or that I am discontented with the power in place. On the contrary. That is why I want to demonstrate my firm commitment and the sincerity of those who accompany me." Goukouni appealed to all Chadians: "It is imperative for all Chadians to open their hearts and to work hand in hand to reconstruct their country, nothing but that."

18. (U) After meeting with President Deby August 19, Goukouni said he had come back to stay: "I have decided to come back definitively to Chad to be of use to my country. Two essential facts led to this decision: first of all the Chad today has changed a lot from the Chad of before. The authorities have a desire to lift the country out of its under-development." Goukouni said the second reason was that Sudan had been refusing him a visa for three years to go to meet Chad opposition figures based in camps in the Darfur region. He repeated that that he wanted to help negotiate a peace deal between the rebels and the Chad government: "I have come back to contribute to peace and so I will not be getting involved in politics," he said. "I will not be setting up a political party. I am just a simple Chad citizen like everyone else."

PREVIOUS TRIPS TO CHAD

19. (U) Under the aegis of then Gabonese President Bongo, Goukouni met with Deby in April 2007 in Libreville to discuss ways to end the current civil war. Saying that Chad was in grave danger, Goukouni at that time expressed a hope that he could use his "moral authority" to save it and assembled a team of collaborators for this purpose. He said that Deby had agreed to Goukouni's desire to be allowed to return to Chad from exile in the future. Goukouni said "I'll commit myself to go to these Chadians who have taken up arms to

propose the idea that they talk with Deby. Those who accept will be heard. Those who refuse, we'll know who they are." Later that month, the leaders of two rebel groups -- Mahamat Nouri of the Union of Forces for Democracy and Development (UFDD) and Timane Erdimi of the Rally of Democratic Forces (RAFD) rejected Goukouni's offer to mediate. Goukouni returned to Chad again in July 2007, along with about twenty other exiled opponents of the regime, for a day of discussions with Deby regarding the rebellion and how to resolve the situation.

¶10. (U) In 2008, a Radio France reporter compiled and published a set of interviews with Goukouni covering the period of his life from his childhood days of looking after camels through the FROLINAT rebellion and into the 1990s after President Deby came to power. This compilation of interviews, "Temoignage pour l'histoire du Tchad" (Eye-witness Account of Chad's History), provides a rare glimpse of the various events and personalities that affected so profoundly the post-independence period of rebellion (1965-1990).

BIO NOTES

¶11. (U) Goukouni Oueddei, born 1944, was Head of State of Chad in 1979 and again from 1979 to 1982. Goukouni, an ethnic Teda (also known as Toubou), a branch of the Gorane ethnic group that dominates north-central and north-west Chad, is the son of Oueddei Kichidemi, Derde (traditional chief) of the Teda people.

¶12. (U) Goukouni entered politics in the late 1960s as a militant in the National Liberation Front of Chad, the principal northern and central opposition group opposed to the political dominance enjoyed by southerners under the presidency of Francois Tombalbaye. After Tombalbaye's assassination in 1975, tensions between the two geographical halves escalated into a convoluted civil war that involved several Chadian political groups, Libya, the United States, and France, that lasted through the 1980s

¶13. (U) Goukouni became interim Chadian head of state in March 1979, was succeeded briefly by Lol Mahamat Choua, then was acclaimed President of the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT), which sought national reconciliation, in November 1979. Goukouni's Vice President was Wadel Abdelkader Kamougu (today Chad Defense Minister); his Defense Minister was Hisshne Habr. The personal rivalry between erstwhile allies Goukouni and Habre was intensified by Goukouni's agreement to "unify" Chad and Libya under one government. When his GUNT regime was overthrown by Habr loyalists in June 1982, Goukouni went into exile in Libya. Habr consolidated his own power into a centralized military dictatorship.

¶14. (U) In 1983, Goukouni returned to Chad with substantial Libyan assistance to fight the Habr regime through guerilla warfare and called a new constitution and liberalization of political party activity. In October 1986, the Libyans arrested Oueddei, and in the process was shot and wounded. He then broke with the Libyans and went into exile in Algiers instead in February 1987. However, some questioned whether he had truly broken with the Libyans, and in July 1987 Oueddei said that he was on good terms with them.

COMMENT

¶15. (SBU) It is too early to assess the full impact of Goukouni's latest return trip, including what official position if any he will receive from the GOC and how successful he will be in wooing Chad armed rebels, but the ex-President's decision to engage with Deby (like that of ex-rebel Ahmat Soubiane's similar recent decision - REF B) contributes to the Deby government's legitimacy and burnishes its commitment to national reconciliation writ large.

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figure" whose presence in Chad permits Deby to demonstrate his regime's openness and inclusiveness, including to former foes; in this sense Goukouni replaces the recently deceased ex-President Malloum (REF C) in the "petit pantheon" of ex-rulers now reconciled with "the power in place." Finally, Goukouni's return adds credibility to Deby's commitment to "national reconciliation" including with Chad rebels in Sudan. It probably also earns Deby points with the Libyans as well.

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